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RUEHXS/ASSOCIATION OF SOUTHEAST ASIAN NATIONS
RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING 6949
RUEHBY/AMEMBASSY CANBERRA 9595
RUEHUL/AMEMBASSY SEOUL 5418
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 1539
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BANGKOK 000951

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SUBJECT: THAILAND PROTEST UPDATE APRIL 10: REDSHIRTS SHIFT
TO PATTAYA IN ATTEMPT TO DISRUPT ASEAN+ SUMMITS

REF: BANGKOK 935

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Classified By: DCM JAMES F. ENTWISTLE, REASON 1.4 (B, D)

SUMMARY AND COMMENT

11. (SBU) Summary: The center of gravity of anti-government red-shirt protests shifted from Bangkok to Pattaya April 10, aiming to disrupt the April 10-12 ASEAN Summits. The numbers of protesters in Bangkok continued to drop ahead of the traditional Thai New Year holiday, although ongoing taxi blockades of key intersections and streets continued to exacerbate traffic conditions. The scene in Pattaya appeared more chaotic throughout the day, with police doing a poor job of crowd control even as 16 heads of government and leaders of major institutions like the IMF and World Bank started to arrive. As of COB, ASEAN meetings were proceeding, though some delegations had discussed the possibility of pulling the plug on Leaders' arrivals, with red-shirts milling about directly outside the hotel.

12. (C) Comment: The red-shirts so far have not achieved their goal of bringing down the Abhisit government, but they have exposed the total lack of tactical effectiveness by the Royal Thai Police (RTP) in crowd control, forcing the military to step in to play a more pronounced than expected role at the Pattaya Summit site. The abysmal RTP performance is likely a combination of personal sympathy with the red cause, poor morale after heavy criticism of its actions against PAD yellow-shirt protests and the Queen's overt favoring of the yellow-shirt "victims" of police action in October 2008, and a breakdown in its command structure, since PM Abhisit went on national TV late April 10 vowing that Thai authorities would enforce law and order. That said, Abhisit has only allowed the officers at the protest sites to be armed with riot shields and tear gas; they have not been authorized the carriage of batons or firearms as is standard operating procedure.

13. (C) Comment, cont: While the red-shirts' self-proclaimed "Victory Day" April 10 did not conclude with any changes in government, it did expose the government's inability to ensure order, just as the PAD protests exposed the

ineffectiveness of the Samak and Somchai administrations in 2008. Even if the advent of the Songkhran holiday may sap the protest of staying power in the short term, protests are likely to resume after the holiday break. End Summary and Comment.

NUMBERS DROP IN BANGKOK, BUT TRAFFIC BLOCKADES REMAIN

14. (SBU) Bangkok Metropolitan Police reported that fewer than 10,000 total protesters remained near Government House and Victory Monument by mid-day on April 10. Taxi drivers sympathetic to the red shirts continued to block several major roads and expressway entrances, with reports of protesters stopping vehicles and pedestrians to inquire about their intentions. Overall, the traffic situation improved however, thanks to PM Abhisit having declared April 10 a government holiday, as well as the early departures of those heading out of town for the Songkhran holidays.

ALL EYES ON PATTAYA AS PROTESTERS TARGET ASEAN SUMMITS

15. (SBU) UDD co-leader and Puea Thai MP Jatuporn declared that April 10 would be the red-shirts' "Victory Day" if they could prevent PM Abhisit from hosting Asian leaders at the ASEAN 3 (China, Japan, South Korea) and East Asian Summits (Australia, New Zealand, and India added) in Pattaya April 10-12. For his part, fugitive former PM Thaksin urged supporters to keep fighting in his video-link speech late April 9, vowing "defeat is not an option."

16. (SBU) Even as ASEAN Finance Ministers and Foreign Ministers successfully completed their pre-summit

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ministerials, and leaders of countries like Cambodia, Vietnam, and Singapore arrived in Pattaya, an estimated 1,500-3,000 red-shirts successfully started disrupting access to the Summit site. Police half-heartedly established four picket lines but allowed the red-shirts to push through the first three lines with ease; by 1700, protesters were inside the resort gates, moving up to the front of the hotel itself.

17. (SBU) Red-shirt protesters briefly took the Chonburi governor hostage after he attempted to negotiate with them, releasing him only after ASEAN representatives agreed to allow 10 redshirt leaders inside the hotel to present a list of their demands. After the head of the ASEAN Secretariat's International Division Bara Kumar accepted the letter, red leaders promised to dissolve their protest, the MFA Spokesman told us.

18. (SBU) Note: Despite concerns on the part of several countries and the World Bank about whether their leaders should scrub attendance given questions about security, to the best of our knowledge no Leaders had canceled attendance as of COB, though neither had the red-shirts dispersed. Ambassador and DCM are slated to attend a related "ASEAN Global Dialogue" the evening of April 12 in Bangkok. U.S. military personnel on liberty in Pattaya from the USS John C. Stennis, which docked in nearby Laem Chabang port April 9, report no difficulties.

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